United Nations A/C.5/56/SR.25

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
30 November 2001
English
Original: French

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 25th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 November 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Orr (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Canada)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Agenda item 127: United Nations common system (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

01-62438 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Effah-Apenteng (Ghana), Mr. Orr (Canada), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 127: United Nations common system (*continued*) (A/56/30 and A/56/485)

1. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, reiterated the importance of the United Nations common system and of the role of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) in the definition and coordination of the system. The Rio Group had a number of observations to make on the report of the International Civil Service Commission (A/56/30). Generally speaking, it endorsed the recommendations contained in the report and wished to reiterate its view that, in order for the organizations of the common system to attract the most qualified staff, they should offer the best possible conditions of service, which meant competitive conditions of service.

2. The Commission supported the effort that was being made to modernize human resources management in United Nations organizations and in the framework for human resources management, which was a very useful tool that had been introduced by the Commission in its 2000 report (A/55/30), and had annexed to its report updated standards of conduct for the international civil service, which had been drawn up in collaboration with the organizations of the common system and staff representatives. The Rio Group approved in principle the updated version.

3. In its review of the pay and benefits system, the Commission should take account of the framework for human resources management and, in accordance with the principles set out in its report, it should be guided by strict respect for the Noblemaire and Flemming principles. While greater flexibility was certainly needed in order to modernize the system and ensure its competitiveness, every effort should also be made to ensure it offered sufficient guarantees to staff, whose trust and dedication could be secured in that way.

4. Contractual arrangements should be adapted to the new realities, but should at the same time be geared towards attracting the most competent staff and ensuring that increased flexibility did not come at the expense of the necessary transparency and workforce stability. The Rio Group approved the taking of an inventory of the various types of contracts in current use and would like to see the completed inventory published in the report of the Commission.

5. The United Nations/comparator service net remuneration margin should be set at 12.2 per cent for 2001, a figure that was within the optimum range, but below the median point. That trend must therefore be followed closely, especially at the D-1 and D-2 levels.

6. With regard to the strengthening of the common system, the Rio Group wished to point out that in order to guarantee the transparency of the process, the mandate and membership of the Commission could not be reviewed without the full participation of the Commission and of Member States.

7. **Mr. Kendall** (Argentina) associated his delegation with the statement made by Chile on behalf of the Rio Group and stressed the importance of the Commission's work to the strengthening of the common system. His delegation noted with interest the Commission's review of the pay and benefits system, a review that was essential to the modernization of human resources management and helpful to the adoption of a comprehensive and global approach to the various elements of the system. It supported the objectives of the review as proposed by the Commission, including the establishment of a closer link between efficiency and compensation, provided, however, that the appraisal of professional conduct was transparent and that appropriate guarantees were offered to staff members. It was also important to study the various options for improving management capacity, with the aim being to attract competent management staff. Since the objective was to achieve a balance between competitiveness and flexibility on the one hand and a stable workforce on the other, it was also important for the organizations of the common system and staff representatives to participate actively in the debate so as to ensure that a consensus was reached on the measures that would be proposed.

8. The Argentine delegation was pleased that the updating of the standards of conduct for the international civil service was the fruit of collaboration with organizations and staff representatives. It hoped that the updated standards would be considered in informal meeting. It noted, moreover, that the net remuneration margin had been declining since 1997, to the detriment of United Nations staff, and hoped that the General Assembly would be kept informed of the future evolution of the margin. With regard to the

strengthening of the common system, his delegation was of the view that the objective of the review of the Commission's mandate and membership should be to maintain the quality of its work and that the review should be carried out in full transparency, which meant that Member States should be involved in the exercise.

9. **Ms. Sequeira** (Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA)), speaking in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/213, said CCISUA had the impression that, far from respecting the nature of the United Nations, whose work was based on the objectives of the Charter, which were not quantifiable, the reform process undertaken by the Secretary-General — which only focused on competitiveness, cost-effectiveness and performance — reflected a corporate culture. However, the United Nations was not a multinational company. It was an organization that worked for the well-being of the whole world. Consequently, a reform that drew inspiration from what was being done in the private sector could not be applied wholesale.

10. The conditions of work of the staff, the main assets of the Organization, had been gradually eroded for about 20 years in terms of both benefits and tenure. The aim of CCISUA, which also worked for future generations of staff — since the United Nations would always need to attract and keep competent and motivated staff — was to participate in all the discussions concerning the future of the Organization.

11. CCISUA believed that there was a need to go back to basics. Thus, in order to recruit the most competent candidates needed to fulfil the Organization's objectives, the job requirements must be clearly spelled out in the vacancy announcements. Competent supervisors, who were themselves promoted or recruited on the basis of their qualifications and the objectives set, were needed to train the new recruits. In that regard, a workable career development plan designed to motivate staff could permit the selection of the most qualified managers from among the staff before envisaging external recruitment. A strategy for the use of available human resources needed to be put into place.

12. In order to retain the most competent staff, the organizations of the common system must motivate them; in particular, younger staff should be motivated by offering them training programmes that would enable them to satisfy their desire to move around. Mobility would be promoted if adequate benefits were offered. Older staff members had family constraints which were hardly conducive to mobility; yet they moved up in the hierarchy, thus running the risk of depriving other staff members, including the younger ones, of their experience when they were assigned to administrative positions. Social policy was another element that should be considered. The organizations of the common system should take the multicultural environment of the system into account and adapt their social policy to specific duty stations.

13. The salaries and benefits structure must take all those elements into account and any reform of human resources management must also safeguard the independence of the Secretariat, to which the staff was strongly attached.

14. The issue of contractual arrangements, which was yet to be considered by ICSC with the full participation of staff representatives, was linked to the need to recruit and retain the best staff members and to the independence of the Secretariat. There were currently many inconsistencies with respect to the granting of contracts and there was definitely a need to review the system. However, as far as the elimination of permanent contracts was concerned, the aim should be to get rid of staff who performed poorly. Care must be taken to ensure that the most competent staff was not lost. Moreover, there must be guarantees against the abuse of power on the part of supervisors.

15. CCISUA feared that mobility as planned in the human resources management reform would become a determining factor for promotion, as opposed to other factors of professional merit. In that regard, in order not to demoralize general service staff, they should be offered prospects of international transfers, to which they were currently not entitled.

16. Lastly, there must never be cost savings at the expense of the security, safety and health of staff. Concrete measures must be put into place on the ground, especially in remote locations; the Organization's image must be improved; and efforts must be made not only to ensure that staff were perceived as non-political but also to protect local staff.

17. **Mr. Grandjean** (Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations) supported the proposed increase in the base/floor salary scale. However, he drew attention to the long-standing need to restore

competitiveness to the salaries of United Nations officials, which still lagged behind those of other international organizations by as much as 50 per cent and pointed out that the pay gap between the comparator and the private sector in the United States of America remained at 32 per cent. The Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) also supported the recommended staff assessment rates. While it was in favour of the recommended new salary scales for General Service staff in Rome, it drew attention to the need to reintegrate the language factor into salary calculations.

18. With regard to the standards of conduct for the International Civil Service, FICSA was satisfied that an agreement had been reached, but it regretted the process that had been used, and hoped that in future decisions based on consensus would be respected. It was important for all staff to be familiar with the standards, so that they would be respected by everyone. Regarding the work of ICSC on contractual arrangements, the working paper provided at the summer session did not furnish enough relevant data. As for the substance, FICSA believed strongly that a proper balance between career and time-limited appointments was required.

19. It was time to address the long-standing problem caused by the margin. In grades P-5 to D-2, it had fallen below 10 per cent. FICSA supported a real increase in salaries to raise the margin to the agreed 15 per cent. It welcomed the increases in post adjustment across the headquarters duty stations, but pointed out that post adjustment was intended to provide purchasing power parity across duty stations, not to compensate for inadequate base salaries. It drew attention to the need to continue the regular biennial review of allowances while the review of the pay and benefits system was under way; the Federation intended to participate fully in that review. Noting that the key word for the review had shifted from "simplification" to "flexibility", he urged caution, particularly with regard to such innovations as "broadbanding" and the creation of a "Senior Executive Service", and stressed that flexibility and accountability went hand in hand. The principle of equity must not be sacrificed just to provide higher salaries for a select few.

20. FICSA requested Member States to call for the application of international labour standards within international organizations, and for the incorporation of those standards into their rules and regulations. It would also like to see all organizations develop new modalities for effective staff-management consultations and full staff participation in decisions on issues relating to human resources.

21. Since the two staff federations had resumed work with ICSC, the amendments to their rules concerning the consultative process and working arrangements should be implemented without delay. Lastly, FICSA called upon Member States to agree that the review of the mandate, membership and functioning of ICSC should be an integral component of the reform process under way.

22. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said he hoped that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions would soon present a report on the administrative and financial implications of the decisions and recommendations contained in the report of ICSC (A/56/485).

23. **The Chairman** said that he would transmit the Syrian delegation's request to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.